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Matters related to the implementation of the Convention: round table 1

Economic empowerment through inclusive social protection and poverty reduction strategies

Background paper prepared by the Secretariat**

Introduction

1. The world's more than 1 billion persons with disabilities, comprising approximately 15 per cent of the global population, constitute a significant group that can contribute to development and society, and yet their potential has not always been realized because of existing barriers. Many of those of working age — at least 780 million people — face physical, social, economic and cultural barriers that hinder their access to education, skills development, employment, health services and, more broadly, society on an equal basis with others. Evidence shows that persons with disabilities are at greater risk of poverty than persons without disabilities in both developed and developing countries.[1] A constant state of poverty or precariousness, reduced economic resilience and repeated economic shocks from a lack of coverage for needed goods and services are the norm for many. Many also face significant constraints to owning assets, such as land, or to obtaining access to credit. They are also very often denied a voice and power in the political process, and there is a lack of attention to their rights.

* CRPD/CSP/2013/1.

** Compiled on the basis of contributions by the International Labour Organization and other sources to facilitate the discussions during round table 1, to be held on 17 July 2013.

[1] Report of the Secretary-General entitled "Keeping the promise: realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities towards 2015 and beyond" (A/65/173); see also Rebecca Yeo, *Chronic Poverty and Disability*, Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper No. 4 (Somerset, United Kingdom, Action on Disability and Development, 2001) and World Health Organization and World Bank, *World Report on Disability* (Geneva, 2011).

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2. While reliable comparable data on labour market participation by persons with disabilities are scarce, common patterns are reported in countries at different levels of development. Compared with non-disabled persons, persons with disabilities are less likely to be in full-time employment; more likely to be unemployed; and significantly more likely to be economically inactive. In developing countries, they are more likely to work in the informal economy. When in employment, workers with disabilities are more likely to count among the working poor, as they are frequently in low-paying precarious jobs with poor career prospects and working conditions and limited or no pension and health benefits. Women with disabilities are less likely to have a decent job than either women without disabilities or men with disabilities, and persons with certain types of disability, including intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, face greater barriers in finding and retaining employment.

3. Persons with disabilities are also economically worse off and at greater risk of poverty than non-disabled persons, in particular where they are not provided with adequate social protection. These patterns reflect untapped human resources that, if adequate measures were taken, could contribute to sustainable development efforts at the local, regional and national levels. An International Labour Organization (ILO) pilot study of 10 low- and middle-income developing countries found that the loss to gross domestic product (GDP) from the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market is estimated to be between 3 and 7 per cent of GDP.[2] On the other hand, returns to society from investment in more effective strategies for inclusion are recognized. For example, in Australia, it was predicted that a cumulative $43 billion increase in GDP over the period 2011-2021 would result if the unemployment and labour force participation gaps between persons with and without disabilities were reduced by one third.[3]

4. While many countries have made significant progress in the past two decades in improving access to health services and education, both income and non-income inequalities have grown in many parts of the world. For example, in some countries where there has been a significant increase in children's attendance at primary schools, the rate of attendance of children with disabilities remains extremely low, meaning that the gap has increased. The rapid economic expansion in the past two to three decades has not automatically translated into human development for everyone.[4] The benefits of this growth have largely gone to those at the top of the income distribution, as well as to highly skilled workers. Furthermore, many persons with disabilities were affected by the series of global crises experienced in recent years, including the food and energy crisis, the financial and economic crisis and the ongoing public debt crisis in the euro area, as well as the effects of ongoing climate change.

5. In response to these multiple challenges, it has become even more imperative to pursue development strategies that include social, economic and environmental policies to empower excluded social groups. These include persons with disabilities, who are disproportionately located at the margins of the formal labour market and are

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[2] Sebastian Buckup, *The Price of Exclusion: The Economic Consequences of Excluding People with Disabilities from the World of Work*, Employment Working Paper No. 43 (Geneva, ILO, 2009).

[3] Deloitte Access Economics, "The economic benefits of increasing employment for people with disability", report commissioned by the Australian Network on Disability (Sydney, 2011).

[4] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2013: The Rise of the South — Human Progress in a Diverse World* (New York, 2013).

denied equality of opportunity when it comes to essential public goods and services, such as education, health and accessible and user-friendly public infrastructure (e.g. transportation and buildings). Improvements in these areas, including the provision of basic social protection, have been shown to enhance the capabilities and participation of persons with disabilities, reduce isolation and economic precarity and improve their living standards and, by implication, those of their families and communities.[5] Such positive measures as quotas or reservations in public procurement could also provide strong leverage for the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities.

6. The present paper provides an overview of the international normative framework relating to the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities through employment, social protection and poverty reduction. The paper also reviews the work of United Nations entities to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in those areas. It identifies key issues that need to be addressed to ensure that the voices of persons with disabilities living in poverty are heard and their needs are met through inclusive social protection and poverty reduction strategies.

7. The term "empowerment", as used in the present paper, refers to a concept that has been used in United Nations forums for a number of years (see the report of the Secretary-General on promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all (E/CN.5/2013/3)). People, especially from marginalized social groups, such as persons with disabilities, can be empowered through their effective engagement in economic, social and political life; the provision of adequate resources and assets; and the flexibility to exercise choice and control over their rights and well-being.

8. The economic empowerment of persons with disabilities can be achieved if they have access to jobs and livelihoods and to basic entitlements, such as education, health services and housing. In turn, economic participation facilitates the social integration of persons with disabilities.

Normative frameworks

9. Policy guidance on the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities through inclusive social protection and poverty reduction strategies is provided both by principal international human rights instruments concerning persons with disabilities and by international norms and standards pertaining to social protection, including ILO social security standards. Together, these instruments provide the normative basis for fostering the empowerment and full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society.

10. The general principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities include equality of opportunity, non-discrimination and equality between men and women (article 3). The Convention obliges States parties to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy all human rights on an equal basis with others and to take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realization of those rights without discrimination. Provisions of specific relevance to poverty reduction include article 24, on the right to education, article 27, on the right to work and employment, and article 28, on the right to an adequate standard of living and social

[5] World Health Organization and World Bank, *World Report on Disability*.

protection. Of particular relevance to poverty reduction through decent work are provisions requiring States parties to promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business. Also of relevance are provisions relating to access to State assistance with disability-related expenses, such as training and counselling; to affordable services and devices for disability-related needs; and to poverty reduction programmes (article 28).

11. Promoting access for persons with disabilities to vocational rehabilitation, skills development and employment as a means of improving their standard of living is an underlying aim of a number of ILO standards relating to persons with disabilities. These include Recommendation No. 99 concerning vocational rehabilitation of disabled persons; the Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons (Convention No. 159) and its accompanying Recommendation No. 168; and the Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace (2001).

12. With regard to social protection, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. States should safeguard and promote the realization of their right to social protection without discrimination on the basis of disability, including equal access to appropriate and affordable services and devices for and other assistance with disability-related needs, social protection and poverty reduction programmes, assistance with disability-related expenses, public housing programmes and retirement benefits and programmes.

13. ILO social security standards include a number of conventions and recommendations. The instrument adopted most recently is Recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors of social protection, which provides guidance to member States in establishing and maintaining nationally defined social protection floors as a fundamental element of their national social security systems.[6] Such social protection floors should guarantee, at the least, effective access to essential health care, education and nutrition security, as well as a basic level of income security throughout the life course, as defined at the national level. Some of the principles set out in the Recommendation are of particular relevance for persons with disabilities, including the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality and responsiveness to special needs, as well as respect for the rights and dignity of people covered by the social security guarantees.

Work of the United Nations

14. The efforts of the United Nations system to promote economic empowerment through poverty reduction strategies and inclusive social protection reflect its commitment to the realization of human rights and the promotion of economic and social progress for all.

15. The General Assembly has, in recent years, repeatedly expressed concern that persons with disabilities continue to be subject to multiple or aggravated forms of

[6] ILO, *Social Security for All: Building Social Protection Floors and Comprehensive Social Security Systems* (Geneva, 2012).

discrimination and have remained largely invisible in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals (see General Assembly resolutions 65/186, 66/124 and 67/140). It has therefore urged for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities by, inter alia, explicitly including and mainstreaming disability issues and persons with disabilities in national plans and tools designed to contribute to the full realization of the Goals and enabling persons with disabilities to participate as agents and beneficiaries of development by ensuring that programmes and policies, including those for poverty eradication, are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.

16. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, as the focal point on disability within the United Nations system, supports relevant intergovernmental bodies and processes with a view to mainstreaming disability in development, including through its analytical work, the implementation of catalytic projects to support the capacity-building of Member States, and collaboration with multi-stakeholders in both disability and development communities around the world.

17. In 2007, the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established within the United Nations to promote compliance with the principles of the Convention and increase the scale and effectiveness of United Nations involvement in disability issues. The Group adopted a statement of commitment to the Convention, operationalized through a joint strategy and plan of action, to support States in their implementation of the Convention and promote disability inclusion in development and society.[7] With a view to mainstreaming disability throughout the work of the United Nations, the Inter-Agency Support Group collaborated with the United Nations Development Group in the development of a guidance note on including the rights of persons with disabilities in United Nations programming at the country level.

18. Many United Nations entities have been involved in developing resource materials, providing policy advice, building capacity and implementing technical cooperation projects to alleviate and eradicate poverty in individuals with disabilities and to empower them to fully participate in development and in all aspects of society.[8]

19. With regard to social protection, one of the key instruments of joint action across the United Nations system has been the Social Protection Floor Initiative, adopted in April 2009 as one of nine joint initiatives to respond to the challenges of the global financial, economic and social crisis. The Initiative fosters coordination and collaboration among United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and other development partners under the joint leadership of ILO and the World Health Organization. The social protection floor is an integrated approach towards strengthening social and economic development and realizing human rights and has been widely recognized and accepted in numerous international, regional and national forums. In the national context, a social protection floor comprises: (a) universal access to essential services (e.g. health, education, housing, water and sanitation and other services, as nationally defined); and (b) social transfers in cash or in kind, to ensure income security, food security, adequate nutrition and access to essential services. Consequently, national social protection floors are of particular

[7] See www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=45&pid=323.

[8] See www.un.org/disabilities/documents/iasg/iasg_compilation_resources.pdf.

relevance for ensuring inclusive social protection for people with disabilities.[9] The Human Rights Council recognized this in a recent resolution on the work and employment of persons with disabilities (Human Rights Council resolution 22/3, para. 5 (j)).

Economic empowerment through inclusive social protection and poverty reduction strategies

20. Economic empowerment is widely recognized as a key factor for enhancing the autonomy of persons with disabilities and their full participation in society. Measures to foster the participation of persons with disabilities in decent employment, reduce poverty and enhance income security are among the core elements of strategies that should be adopted by countries as they take action to implement their commitments, including the internationally agreed development goals, the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Strategies need to be developed and implemented in consultation with persons with disabilities so that their voices are heard and their concerns appropriately addressed.

21. Available evidence on the higher risk of poverty faced by persons with disabilities indicates that policies promoting access to education, health care and employment are particularly important in improving the well-being of persons with disabilities and their households and in enabling them to rise out of poverty.

22. In this context, progressively building national social protection floors and comprehensive social protection systems that explicitly include all people with disabilities and respond to their specific needs will contribute to the realization of human rights and the fostering of inclusive, equitable and sustainable development and society.

23. In developing such policies, strategies and measures, account should be taken of possible barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities. These may include a lack of information about employment and training opportunities, entitlements and available life-changing supports; the inaccessibility of workplaces and public transport; stereotypes and prejudices about their capabilities and contributions; or a lack of consideration of the situations of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation of the programme. Effective consultation and involvement at the outset and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms that are sensitive to disability issues can help to detect such obstacles and provide a solid evidence base for subsequent policy reforms.

24. Elements of social protection systems that explicitly respond to the needs of persons with disabilities include schemes or programmes that provide income support to persons with disabilities and their families (e.g. disability-related cash transfer programmes, other forms of social assistance or disability pensions), social health protection and other mechanisms to ensure universal health coverage, schemes and programmes that support the integration or reintegration of persons with disabilities into the labour market and facilitate their participation in employment. In this respect, financial support to cover the disability-related costs associated with participation in employment can help to overcome poverty traps and to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in productive employment.

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[9] Social Protection Floor Advisory Group, *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization* (Geneva, ILO, 2011).

25. Policies and strategies to enhance the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities should also consider the mechanisms available to support the participation of children with disabilities in education and vocational training programmes. If effective measures are taken to equip persons with disabilities with adequate education and skills, they will find it easier to participate in decent employment at a later stage. Similarly, opportunities should be developed so that adults with disabilities have access to vocational rehabilitation, skills development and lifelong learning to facilitate their return to work following the acquisition of a disability. The needs of older workers with disabilities should also be taken into account, in particular in contexts where the lack of adequate pensions for a large proportion of the population necessitates continued engagement in employment well into old age. The specific experiences of poverty and/or precariousness of persons with disabilities should be taken into account. Specific programmes targeted at women and indigenous persons with disabilities to increase decent employment and ensure safe and healthy working environments are needed to address intersecting forms of discrimination and economic disadvantages where they exist.

26. The initial discussions regarding international development priorities for the period beyond 2015 suggest that the promotion of decent employment and social protection are key elements of an emerging post-2015 international development framework. Such discussions provide an opportunity to increase the enjoyment by persons with disabilities of equal rights, empower persons with disabilities economically and ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in social protection systems and poverty reduction strategies in the development framework.

Questions for consideration

27. The following questions are presented for consideration:

- What measures have been taken by Member States to ensure that their national development policies and programmes promote the rights and economic empowerment of persons with disabilities through inclusive social protection policies and poverty reduction strategies?
- Please share examples of measures taken by Member States to better address the needs of persons with disabilities in poverty reduction strategies and facilitate their access to social protection where needed.
- To what extent do measures taken by Member States ensure that their national social protection systems cover persons with disabilities without discrimination and that their special disability-related needs are being met?
- What should be included or further enhanced in development policies with respect to designing, implementing and monitoring inclusive social protection policies and poverty reduction strategies?
- What measures should be proposed by the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities to ensure that internationally agreed goals for the post-2015 development framework adequately address inequality and the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities through inclusive social protection and poverty reduction strategies?